

Wisdom for the Workplace

Living for Christ at work can be a daily challenge, especially when one's superiors or peers don't follow Jesus or believe in the Bible. But Dr. Lewis Andrews believes it is possible to be a positive influence for Christ in everyday life, including where most people spend most of their time—in the workplace. His latest book, *Living Spiritually in the Material World: The Lost Wisdom for Finding Inner Peace, Satisfaction, and Lasting Enthusiasm in Earthly Pursuits*, points to America's past to show the way to believers in the present.

Andrews says two themes have struck him in the last couple of years, the impact the early college presidents had on America's growth and a new understanding in psychology of what makes for a happy and healthy life. These two themes dovetail in *Living Spiritually in the Material World*.

"From the founding of Harvard in 1640 up until the First World War, almost three centuries, every president of every American college was a minister, and they all taught a course on how to live spiritually in the material world," he says. "So back then you went to college and you would study math and English and science, but then when you got out and started your career, you would know how to serve God in the larger world as a doctor, lawyer, business person or whatever your career. And this had an enormous impact on American history. It's forgotten now, but it took the U.S. from a bunch of small colonies to the greatest power in the world in just 150 years."

He believes the thinking of the college presidents, which he encapsulates in *Living Spiritually in the Material World*, paced the growth of the country.

"America's success came from a keen awareness of God's presence," he says. In addition to "not treating God as a

distant figure, the presidents' teachings also included regarding one's own intuition as a source of spiritual signaling from God and always remembering to be true to one's values, even when no one else would know. So they had a list of about 10 principles, which I go over in the book, to discover God's will and to live it in your life."

Andrews, who is president of the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation of Connecticut, has gained considerable experience as both a social psychologist, with degrees from Princeton and Stanford, and as a research fellow at Yale Divinity School. Bridging these fields in his speaking and writing, he has observed a radical change in modern psychology's view of faith.

"Psychology, for many years, was very anti-religious, very anti-spiritual," he says. "But in the last 20 or 30 years, there's really been a turnaround because it's been discovered that people who pray, people who try to serve God in their lives, people who keep true to moral principles—the things that the early college presidents talked about—these are what make for happiness and health."

Andrews' desire to help Christians be light in the world led him to write this book. The college presidents were successful in doing this, and so can today's Christians learn to live this way as well.

"How you negotiate the real world and stay true to God has a huge impact on American history," he says. "It's really been forgotten for the last hundred years, so that's what really inspired the book."

The President's Seminar

Biblical wisdom was once the foundation of higher education in the U.S. That's because almost every early college in U.S. history began as a seminary.

“The famous schools—Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton—all started as places to train ministers,” Andrews says. “But then it became clear to the presidents of these schools, who were ministers, that a lot of the students weren’t going to become clergy. They were there for the education, and when they graduated, they were going to become doctors and lawyers or business people.”

The realization that students were using their theological education as a jumping-off point to enter other professions led to an addition to the students’ coursework—a seminar to help undergraduates learn how to live spiritually in the material world. Officially, the class was titled “Moral Philosophy,” but the students had a simpler name for it: “the president’s seminar.”

“This went on for about 300 years, from the founding of Harvard right up until the first World War, and it had a tremendous influence on America,” Andrews says. “When campus populations grew to the point where it became impractical to have one person teach the seminar to every undergraduate, the content was divided into a series of Sunday sermons, which students were required to attend right up until the middle of the 20th century.

At the same time, this teaching was published in self-help books for use both on campus and by the broader public—in turn inspiring the founding of many important social service organizations, including the YMCA and the precursor to groups like Alcoholics Anonymous. The presidents even had a strong international influence, as Andrews documents in his book.

10 Powerful Principles

The heart of *Living Spiritually in the Material World* is its focus on the 10 life-transforming principles developed by the early college presidents and their relevance for today. And while the book is certainly helpful to individuals in their

spiritual walk, Andrews believes it's a great resource for churches to use for small group studies.

"The chapters really lend themselves to a small group discussion," he says, noting that each chapter focuses on one principle in depth.

"In every chapter, I use both examples from the presidents' own lives as well as many modern situations," Andrews says, noting that the book is written to be "digestible" without being oversimplified.

"It's something that you really get the most out of by thinking about each lesson, and so I thought that for a church study group, it would be interesting because each lesson could be a topic for discussion," he says.

Andrews, who has read every book the early college presidents wrote, worked hard to find quotes from the presidents that "drive home in a succinct way the point of the chapter," he says of *Living Spiritually in the Material World*. And he ends each chapter with a Scripture passage that reinforces the presidents' wisdom.

Among the lessons he culls from the teachings of the early college presidents are to "trust your intuition," "to avoid being too wedded to your plans"; "to cope spiritually with adversity"; "to elevate the spiritual importance of daily encounters"; and "to expect moodiness and discontent."

Indicative of its importance, the first lesson in the book is "to hold the greatest thought—namely, God's ever-presence."

"In the middle of a busy workday filled with meetings, projects and email, it can be difficult to keep the presence of God at the forefront of one's mind," Andrews admits. "But the presidents show us how to do it."

"Far more harmful than honestly questioning God's existence is

seeing Him as some remote being who long ago set the universe in motion, who occasionally intervenes to lay down some basic laws or perhaps perform a few convincing miracles, but who otherwise leaves us pretty much on our own," he writes. "Such an outlook may allow the nominal believer to enjoy the occasional Sunday service and feel vaguely comforted at important life passages, such as weddings and funerals, but it deadens the mind's sensitivity to everyday spiritual inspiration."

Andrews describes those throughout history who were consciously aware of God in the world—"men and women who sustained the thought of a present God"—as "God's companions."

"They were not confined to any income group, class, occupation or educational pedigree," he writes. "Nor were they identified by the supposed importance of their work. Some might appear stylish, while others cared little for contemporary fashion.

"What they did have in common was the habit of valuing an activity, not according to its profitability, its social status or by any other external measure, but by its spiritual frame."

In short, like Enoch of old (see Gen. 5:22), they "practiced the presence of God," writes Andrews, illustrating this overarching lesson for daily life.

24/7 Theology

Many of the book's 10 principles are especially relevant to today's growing faith-at-work movement. Indeed, Andrews believes that what is increasingly called "workplace theology" is really just a modern extension of the wisdom of the early college presidents.

"What the early college presidents were very concerned about was that they didn't just teach theology for Sundays," Andrews says. "They identified—and this was the power of what they did

and the reason it had so much influence in America—the core spiritual principles common to all Christian denominations which made one able to serve God in the larger world. Up until maybe 100 years ago, if you were running a business or being a doctor or being a lawyer or whatever profession, you were consciously serving God in the way you had been taught at school. Today, there is a renewed interest in this way of being from a growing number of organizations, including the Consortium of Christian Study Centers, Trinity Forum and Theology of Work Project.

“More and more people want to live their faith not just on Sundays, but where they spend most of their time, which is at their jobs or maybe in a service activity or some kind of nonprofit,” Andrews says. “But this is what the Christian college presidents really had to teach—how to apply your faith in the larger world, even if working with people who don’t share it.”

The “lost wisdom” he refers to in the subtitle of *Living Spiritually in the Material World* helps believers avoid separating their faith from the rest of life. Sadly, too many of today’s Christians have learned to compartmentalize their lives.

“They go to church, but during the week, they don’t think about God too much,” Andrews says. “But if you remember that God is ever present and loving and helpful, it not only changes your mood, it changes your life.”

The wisdom of the early college presidents found in *Living Spiritually in the Material World* shows that obtaining an education should not simply be about a career and a big salary, but rather about growth in character and service to society. Andrews believes strongly that these insights from another age are just as important to 21st-century life as they have ever been.

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